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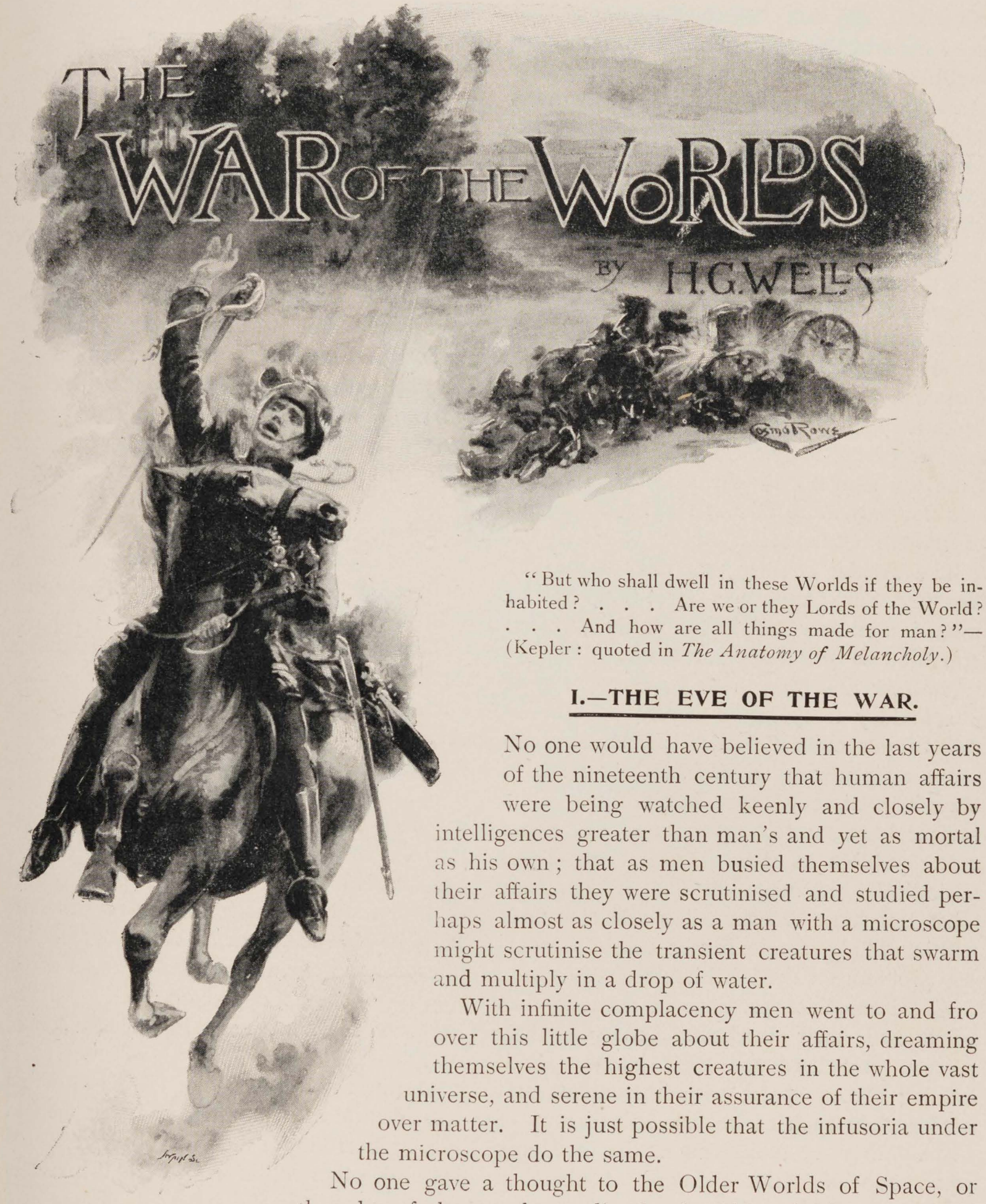
FIREFLIES. From the painting by H. C. Dancer.



"But who shall dwell in these Worlds if they be inhabited? . . . Are we or they Lords of the World? . . . And how are all things made for man?"—(Kepler: quoted in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.)

I.—THE EVE OF THE WAR.

No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that human affairs were being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their affairs they were scrutinised and studied perhaps almost as closely as a man with a microscope might scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water.

With infinite complacency men went to and fro over this little globe about their affairs, dreaming themselves the highest creatures in the whole vast universe, and serene in their assurance of their empire over matter. It is just possible that the infusoria under the microscope do the same.

No one gave a thought to the Older Worlds of Space, or thought of them only to dismiss the idea of life upon them as impossible or improbable. At most, terrestrial men fancied there might be other men upon Mars, probably inferior to themselves and ready to welcome a missionary enterprise. Yet across the gulf of space minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew up their plans against us. And early in the twentieth century came the great disillusionment.

The planet Mars, I may remind the reader, revolves about the sun at a mean distance of 140,000,000 miles, and the light and heat it receives from the sun is scarcely half of that received by this world. It must be, if the nebular hypothesis has any truth, older than

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our world, and long before this earth ceased to be molten, life upon its surface must have begun its course. The fact that it is scarcely one seventh of the volume of the earth must have accelerated its cooling to the temperature at which life could begin. It has air and water, and all that is necessary for the support of animated existence.

Yet so vain is man, and so blinded by his vanity, that no writer up to the very end of the nineteenth century expressed any idea that intelligent life might have developed there, far, or indeed at all, beyond its earthly level. Nor was it generally understood that since Mars is older than our earth, with scarcely a quarter of the superficial area, and remoter from the sun, it necessarily followed that it was not only more distant from life's beginning there but nearer its end.

The secular cooling that must some day overtake our planet has already gone far indeed with our neighbour. Its physical condition is still largely a mystery, but we know now that even in its equatorial region the midday temperature barely approaches that of our coolest winter. Its air is much more attenuated than ours, its oceans have shrunk until they cover but a third of its surface, huge snowcaps gather and melt about either pole as its slow seasons change, and periodically inundate its temperate zones. That last stage of exhaustion which to us is still incredibly remote, has become a present-day problem for the inhabitants of Mars.

The immediate pressure of necessity has brightened their intellects, enlarged their powers, and hardened their hearts. And looking across space, with instruments and intelligences such as we can only dream of vaguely, they see at its nearest distance, only 35,000,000 of miles sunward of them, a morning star of hope, our own warmer planet, green with vegetation and grey with water, with a cloudy atmosphere eloquent of fertility, with glimpses through its drifting cloud wisps, of broad stretches of populous country and narrow navy-crowded seas.

And we men, the creatures who inhabit this earth, must be to them at least as alien and as lowly as are the monkeys and lemurs to us. The intellectual side of man already admits that life is an incessant struggle for existence, and it would seem that in the final issue the same is the belief of the minds upon Mars.

Their world is far gone in its cooling, and this world is still palpitating and crowded with life, but crowded only with what they regard as inferior animals. To carry warfare sunward is their only escape from the destruction that generation by generation creeps upon them.

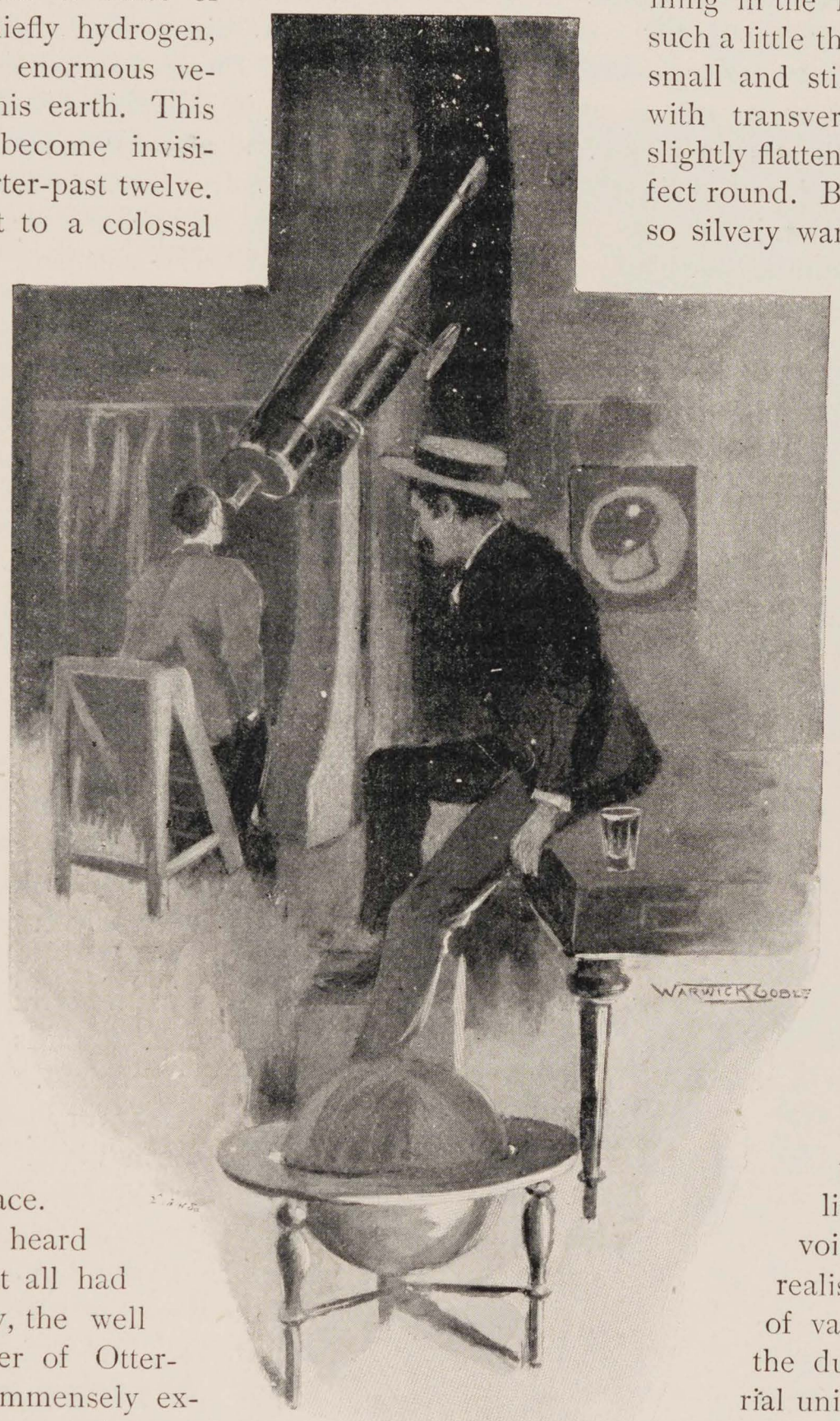
And before we judge of them too harshly in their invasion we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought not only upon animals, such as the vanished bison and the dodo, but upon its own inferior races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants in the space of fifty years. Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians turned against us?

The Martians seemed to have calculated their descent with amazing subtlety—their mathematical learning is evidently far in excess of ours—and to have carried out their preparations with a well-nigh perfect unanimity. Had our instruments only permitted it we might have seen the gathering trouble far back in the nineteenth century. Men like Schiaparelli watched the red planet—it is odd, by the bye, that for countless centuries Mars has been the star of War—but failed to interpret the fluctuating appearances of the markings they mapped so well. All that time the Martians must have been getting ready.

During the opposition of 1894 a great light was seen on the illuminated part of the disc, first by Perrotin, of the Nice observatory, and then by other observers. English readers heard of it first in the issue of *Nature* dated August 2nd. I am inclined to think that the appearance may have been the casting of the huge gun, the vast pit sunk into their planet, from which their shots were fired at us. Peculiar markings, as yet unexplained, were seen near the site of that outbreak during the next two oppositions.

The storm burst upon us six years ago now. As Mars approached opposition, Lavelle of Java set the wires of the as-

tronomical exchange palpitating with the amazing intelligence of a huge outbreak of incandescent gas upon the planet. It had occurred towards midnight of the twelfth, and the spectroscope to which he had at once resorted indicated a mass of flaming gas, chiefly hydrogen, moving at an enormous velocity towards this earth. This jet of fire had become invisible about a quarter-past twelve. He compared it to a colossal puff of flame, suddenly and violently squirted out of the planet, "as flaming gas rushes out of a gun."



I still remember that vigil very distinctly.

A singularly appropriate phrase it proved. Yet the next day there was nothing of this in the papers, except a little note in the *Daily Telegraph*, and the world went in ignorance of one of the gravest dangers that ever threatened the human race. I might not have heard of the eruption at all had I not met Ogilvy, the well known astronomer of Ottershaw. He was immensely excited at the news, and in the excess of his feelings invited me up to take a turn with him that night in a scrutiny of the red planet.

In spite of all that has happened since, I still remember that vigil very distinctly, the black and silent observatory, the shadowed lantern, throwing a feeble glow upon the floor in the corner, the steady ticking of the clockwork of the telescope, the little slit in the roof, an oblong of blue profundity with the star dust streaked across it. Ogilvy moved about, invisible but audible. Looking through the telescope, one saw a circle of deep blue and the little round planet swimming in the field. It seemed such a little thing, so bright and small and still, faintly marked with transverse stripes, and slightly flattened from the perfect round. But so little it was, so silvery warm, a pin's head of light. It was as if it quivered a little, but really this was the telescope vibrating with the activity of the clock-work that kept the planet in view.

As I watched, the little star seemed to grow larger and smaller and to advance and recede, but that was simply that my eye was tired. Forty millions of miles it was from us, more than forty millions of miles of void. Few people realise the immensity of vacancy in which the dust of the material universe swims.

Near it in the field, I remember, were three little points of light, three telescopic stars infinitely remote, and all around it was the unfathomable darkness of empty space. You know how that blackness looks on a frosty starlight night. In a telescope it seems far profounder. And invisible to me because it was so remote and small,

flying swiftly and steadily towards me across that incredible distance, drawing nearer every minute by so many thousands of miles, came the Thing they were sending us, the Thing that was to bring so much struggle and calamity and death to the earth. I never dreamt of it then as I watched; no one on earth dreamt of that unerring missile.

That night, too, there was another jetting out of gas from the distant planet. I saw it. A reddish flash at the edge, the slightest projection of the outline, just as the chronometer struck midnight, and at that I told Ogilvy and he took my place. I went, stretching my legs clumsily, and feeling my way in the darkness, to the little table where the syphon stood, for the night was warm and I was thirsty, while Ogilvy exclaimed at the streamer of gas that came out towards us.

That night another invisible missile started on its way to the earth from Mars, just a second or so under twenty-four hours after the first one. I remember how I sat on the table there in the blackness, with patches of green and crimson swimming before my eyes. I wished I had a light to smoke by, little suspecting the meaning of the minute gleam I had seen and all that it would presently bring me. Ogilvy watched until one, and then gave it up, and we lit the lanterns and walked over to his house. Down below in the darkness were Ottershaw and Chertsey and all their hundreds of people, sleeping in peace.

He was full of speculation that night about the condition of Mars, and scoffed at the vulgar idea of its having inhabitants who were signalling us. His idea was that meteorites might be falling in a heavy shower upon the planet, or that a huge volcanic explosion was in progress. He pointed out to me how unlikely it was that organic evolution had taken the same direction in the two adjacent planets—the chances against anything man-like on Mars are a million to one, he said.

Hundreds of observers saw the flame that night and the night after about midnight, and again the night after, and so for ten nights, a flame each night. Why the shots ceased after the tenth no one on earth has attempted to explain. Dense clouds of smoke or dust, too, visible through a powerful telescope on earth as little, grey, fluctuating patches, spread through the clearness of the planet's atmosphere and obscured its more familiar features.

Even the daily papers woke up to the disturbances at last, and popular notes appeared here, there, and everywhere concerning the volcanoes upon Mars. The serio-comic periodical *Punch*, I remember, made a happy use of it in the political cartoon. And, all unsuspected, those missiles the Martians had fired at us drew earthward, rushing now at a pace of many miles a second through the empty gulf of space, hour by hour and day by day, nearer and nearer.

It seems to me now almost incredibly wonderful that with that swift fate hanging over us men could go about their petty concerns as they did. I remember how jubilant Markham was at securing a new photograph of the planet for the illustrated paper he edited in those days.

People in these latter times scarcely realise the abundance and enterprise of our nineteenth century papers. For my own part I was much occupied in learning to ride the bicycle, and busy upon a series of papers discussing the probable developments of moral ideas as civilisation progressed.

One night (the Thing then could scarcely have been ten million miles away) I went for a walk with my wife. It was starlight, and I explained the Signs of the Zodiac to her, and pointed out Mars, a bright dot of light creeping zenith-ward, towards which so many telescopes were pointed. For in those days there was no terror for men among the stars.

It was a warm night. Coming home, a party of excursionists from Chertsey or Isleworth passed us singing and playing music. There were lights in the upper windows of the houses as the people went to bed. From the railway station in the distance came the sound of shunting trains, ringing and rumbling, softened almost into melody by the distance. My wife pointed out to me the brightness of the red, green and yellow signal lights, hanging in a framework against the sky. It had all seemed so safe and tranquil.

II.—THE FALLING STAR.

THEN came the night of the first falling star. It was seen early in the morning rushing over

Winchester eastward, a line of flame, high in the atmosphere. Hundreds must have seen it and taken it for an ordinary falling star. Albin described it as leaving a greenish streak behind it that glowed for some seconds. Denning, our greatest authority on meteorites, stated that the height of its first appearance was about 90 or 100 miles. It seemed to him that it fell to earth about a hundred miles east of him.

I was at home at that hour and writing in my study, and although my French windows face towards Ottershaw and the blind was up (for I loved in those days to look up at the night sky), I saw nothing of it. Yet this strangest of all things that ever came to earth from outer space must have fallen while I was sitting there, visible to me had I only looked up as it passed. Some of those who saw its flight say it travelled with a hissing sound. I myself heard nothing of that. Many people in Berkshire, Surrey, and Middlesex must have seen the fall of it, and, at most, have thought that another meteorite had descended. No one seems to have troubled to look for the fallen mass that night.

But very early in the morning poor Ogilvy, who had seen the shooting star, and who was persuaded that a meteorite lay somewhere on the common between Horsell, Ottershaw and Woking, rose early with the idea of finding it. Find it he did soon after dawn and not far from the sand-pits. An enormous hole had been made by the impact of the projectile, and the sand and gravel had been flung violently in every direction over the heath and heather. They formed heaps visible a mile and a half away. The heather was on fire eastward, and a thin blue smoke arose against the dawn.

The Thing itself lay almost entirely buried in sand, amidst the scattered splinters of a fir tree it had shivered to fragments in its descent. The uncovered part had the appearance of a huge cylinder, caked over and its outline softened by a thick scaly dun-coloured incrustation. It had a diameter of about thirty yards. He approached the mass, surprised at the size and more so at the shape, since most meteorites are rounded more or less completely. It was, however, still so hot from its flight through the air as to forbid his near approach. A stirring noise within the cylinder he ascribed to the unequal cooling of its substance. For at that time it had not occurred to him that it might be hollow.

Find it he did soon after dawn.

He remained standing at the edge of the pit that the Thing had made for itself, staring at its strange appearance, astonished chiefly at its unusual shape and colour, and dimly perceiving even then some evidence of design in its arrival. The early morning was wonderfully still, and the sun, just clearing the pine trees towards Weybridge, was already warm. He did not remember hearing any birds that morning, there was certainly no breeze stirring, and the only sounds were the faint movements from within the cindery cylinder. He was all alone on the common.

The dull radiation arrested him.

Then suddenly he noticed with a start that some of the grey clinker, the ashy incrustation that covered the meteorite, was falling off the circular edge of the end. It was dropping off in flakes, and raining down upon the sand. A large piece suddenly came off and fell with a sharp noise that brought his heart into his mouth.

For a minute he scarcely realised what this meant, and, although the heat was excessive, he clambered down into the pit close to the bulk to see the thing more clearly. He fancied even then that the cooling of the body might account for this, but what disturbed that idea was the fact that the ash was falling only from the end of the cylinder.

And then he perceived that very slowly the circular top of the cylinder was rotating on its body. It was such a gradual movement, that he saw that it was so only through noticing that a black mark that had been near him five minutes ago, was now at the other side of the circumference. Even then, he scarcely understood what this indicated until he heard a muffled grating sound and saw the black mark jerk forward an inch or so. Then the thing came upon him in a flash. The cylinder was artificial—hollow—with an end that screwed out! Something within the cylinder was unscrewing the top!

"Good Heavens!" said Ogilvy. "There's a man in it—men in it! Half roasted to death! Trying to escape!" At once with a quick mental leap he linked the thing with the flash upon Mars!

The thought of the confined creature was so dreadful to him that he forgot the heat, and went forward to the cylinder to help turn. But luckily the dull radiation arrested him

before he could burn his hands on the still glowing metal. At that, he stood irresolute for a moment, then turned, scrambled out of the pit, and set off running wildly into Woking. The time then must have been somewhere about six o'clock. He met a waggoner and tried to make him understand, but the tale he told and his appearance were so wild—his hat had fallen off in the pit—that the man simply drove on. He was equally unsuccessful with the potman who was just unlocking the doors of the public house by Horsell Bridge. The fellow thought he was a lunatic at large, and made an unsuccessful attempt to shut him into the taproom. That sobered him a little, and when he saw Henderson, the London journalist, in his garden, he called over the palings and made himself understood.

"Henderson," he called; "you saw that shooting star last night?"

"Well?" said Henderson.

"It's out on Horsell Common now."

"Good Lord!" said Henderson. "Fallen meteorite! That's good."

"But it's something more than a meteorite. It's a cylinder—an artificial cylinder, man! And there's something inside."

Henderson stood up with his spade in his hand. "What's that?" he said. He is deaf in one ear. Ogilvy told him all that he had seen. Henderson was a minute or so taking it in. Then he dropped his spade, snatched at his jacket and came out into the road. The two men hurried back at once to the common, and found the cylinder still lying in the same position. But now the sounds inside had ceased, and a thin circle of bright metal showed between the top and the body of the cylinder. Air was either entering or escaping at the rim with a thin, sizzling sound.

They listened, rapped on the scale with a stick, and meeting with no response, they both concluded the man or men inside must be insensible or dead.

Of course the two were quite unable to do anything. They shouted consolation and promises, and went off back to the town again to get help. One can imagine them, covered with sand, excited and disordered, running up the little street in the bright sunlight, just as the shop folks were taking down their shutters, and people were opening their bedroom windows. Henderson went into the railway station at once, in order to persuade the officials to telegraph the news to London. The newspaper articles had prepared men's minds for the reception of the idea.

By eight o'clock, a number of boys and unemployed men had already started for the common to see the "dead men from Mars." That was the form the story took. I heard of it first from my newspaper boy, about a quarter to nine, when I went out to get my *Daily News*. I was naturally startled, and lost no time in going out and across the Ottershaw bridge to the sand-pits.

III.—ON HORSELL COMMON.

I FOUND a little crowd of perhaps twenty people surrounding the huge hole in which the cylinder lay. I have already described the appearance of that colossal bulk, imbedded in the ground. The turf and gravel about it seemed charred as if by a sudden explosion. No doubt its impact had caused a flash of fire. Henderson and Ogilvy were not there. I think they perceived that nothing was to be done for the present, and had gone away to breakfast at Henderson's house.

There were four or five boys sitting on the edge of the pit with their feet dangling, and amusing themselves—until I stopped them—by throwing stones at the giant mass. After I had spoken to them about it, they began playing at "touch" in and out of the group of bystanders.

Among these were a couple of cyclists, a jobbing gardener I employed sometimes, a girl carrying a baby, Gregg the butcher and his little boy, and two or three loafers and golf caddies who were accustomed to hang about the railway station. There was very little talking. Few of the common people in England had anything but the vaguest astronomical ideas in those days. Most of them were staring quietly at the big table-like end of the cylinder, which was still as Henderson and Ogilvy had left it. I fancy the popular expectation of a heap of charred corpses was disappointed by this inanimate bulk. Some

went away while I was there, and other people came. I clambered into the pit and fancied I heard a faint movement under my feet. The top had certainly ceased to rotate.

It was only when I got thus close to it that the strangeness of this object was at all evident to me. At the first glance it was really no more exciting than an overturned carriage or a tree blown across the road. Not so much so, indeed. It looked like a rusty gas float half buried, more than anything else in the world. It required a certain amount of scientific education to perceive that the grey scale on the thing was no common oxide, that the yellowish white metal that gleamed in the crack between the lid and the cylinder had an unfamiliar hue. "Extra-terrestrial" had no meaning for most of the onlookers.

At that time it was quite clear in my own mind that the Thing had come from the planet Mars, but I judged it improbable that it contained any living creature. I thought the unscrewing might be automatic. In spite of Ogilvy I still believed that there were men in Mars. My mind ran fancifully on the possibilites of its containing manuscript, on the difficulties in translation that might arise, whether we should find coins and models in it, and so forth. Yet it was a little too large for assurance on this idea. I felt an impatience to see it opened. About eleven, as nothing seemed happening, I walked back, full of such thoughts, to my home in Maybury. But I found it difficult to get to work upon my abstract investigations.

In the afternoon the appearance of the common had altered very much. The early editions of the evening papers had startled London with enormous headlines: "A MESSAGE RECEIVED FROM MARS," "Remarkable Story from Woking," and so forth. In addition, Ogilvy's wire to the Astronomical Exchange had roused every observatory in the three kingdoms.

There were half-a-dozen flys or more from the Woking station standing in the road by the sand-pits, a basket chaise from Chobham and a rather lordly carriage. Besides that there was quite a heap of bicycles. In addition a large number of people must have walked, in spite of the heat of the day, from Woking and Chertsey. So that there was altogether quite a considerable crowd—one or two gaily dressed ladies among the others.

It was glaringly hot, not a cloud in the sky, nor a breath of wind, and the only shadow was that of the few scattered pine trees. The burning heather had been extinguished, but the level ground towards Ottershaw was blackened as far as one could see, and still giving off vertical streamers of smoke. An enterprising sweet-stuff dealer in the Chobham road had sent up his son with a barrow-load of green apples and ginger beer.

Going to the edge of the pit I found it occupied by a group of about half-a-dozen men, Henderson, Ogilvy, and a tall fair-haired man, that I afterwards learnt was Stent, the Astronomer Royal, with several workmen wielding spades and pickaxes. Stent was giving directions in a clear, high-pitched voice. He was standing on the cylinder, which was now evidently much cooler; his face was crimson, and streaming with perspiration, and something seemed to have irritated him.

A large portion of the cylinder had been uncovered, though its lower end was still imbedded. As soon as Ogilvy saw me among the staring crowd on the edge of the pit, he called to me to come down, and asked me if I would mind going over to see Lord Hilton, the lord of Horsell Manor. The growing crowd, he said, was becoming a serious impediment to their excavations, especially the boys. They wanted a light railing put up, and help to keep the people back. He told me that a faint stirring was occasionally still audible within the case, but that the workmen had failed to unscrew the top, as it afforded no grip to them. The case appeared to be enormously thick, and it was possible that the faint sounds we heard represented a noisy tumult in the interior.

I was very glad to do as he asked, and so become one of the privileged spectators within the contemplated inclosure. I failed to find Lord Hilton at his house, but I was told he was expected from London by the six o'clock train from Waterloo, and as it was then about a quarter past five I went home and had some tea, and walked up to the station to waylay him.

IV.—THE CYLINDER UNSCREWS.

When I returned to the common the sun was setting. Scattered groups were hurrying from the direction of Woking, and one or two persons were returning. The crowd about the pit had increased, and stood out black against the lemon yellow of the sky—a couple of hundred people perhaps. There were a number of voices raised, and some sort of struggle appeared to be going on about the pit. Strange imaginings passed through my mind. As I drew nearer I heard Stent's voice: "Keep back—keep back!" A boy came running towards me. "It's a-movin'," he said to me as he passed.

I ran slantingly and stumbling.

"A-screwin' and a-screwin' out. I don't like it. I'm a-goin' 'ome, I am." I went on to the crowd.

There were really, I should think, two or three hundred people, elbowing and jostling one another, the one or two ladies there being by no means the least active.

"He's fallen in the pit!" cried some one. "Keep back!" said several. The crowd swayed a little, and I elbowed my way through.

Everyone seemed greatly excited. I heard a peculiar humming sound from the pit. "I say!" said Ogilvy; "help keep these idiots back. We don't know what's in the confounded thing, you know!" I saw a young man, a shop assistant in Woking, I believe he was, standing on the cylinder and trying to scramble out of the hole again. The crowd had pushed him in.

The end of the cylinder was being screwed out from within. Nearly two feet of shining screw projected. Somebody blundered against me and I narrowly missed being pitched on to the top of the screw. I turned, and as I did so the screw must have come

out, and the lid of the cylinder fell upon the gravel with a ringing concussion. I struck my elbow into the person behind and turned my head towards the Thing again. For a moment that circular cavity seemed perfectly black. I had the sunset in my eyes.

I think everyone expected to see a man emerge—possibly something a little unlike us terrestrial men, but in all essentials a man. I know I did. But looking, I presently saw something stirring within the shadow, greyish billowy movements, one above another, and then two luminous discs like eyes. Then something resembling a little grey snake, about the thickness of a walking stick, coiled up out of the writhing middle, and wriggled in the air towards me. And then another.

A sudden chill came upon me. There was a loud shriek from a woman behind. I half turned, keeping my eyes fixed upon the cylinder still, from which other tentacles were now projecting, and began pushing my way back from the edge of the pit. I saw astonishment giving place to horror on the faces of the people about me. I heard inarticulate exclamations on all sides. There was a general movement backward. I saw the shopman struggling still on the edge of the pit. I found myself alone, and saw the people on the other side of the pit running off, Stent among them. I looked again at the cylinder, and ungovernable terror gripped me. I stood petrified and staring.

A big greyish rounded bulk, the size perhaps of a bear, was rising slowly and painfully out of the cylinder. As it bulged up and caught the light, it glistened like wet leather. Two large dark-coloured eyes were regarding me steadfastly. It was rounded and had—one might say—a face. There was a mouth under the eyes, the lipless brim of which quivered and panted, and dropped saliva. The body heaved and pulsated convulsively. A lank tentacular appendage gripped the edge of the cylinder, another swayed in the air.

You who have only seen the dead monsters in spirit in the Natural History Museum, shrivelled brown bulks, can scarcely imagine the strange horror of their appearance. The peculiar V-shaped mouth, with its pointed upper lip, the absence of brow ridges, the absence of a chin beneath the wedge-like lower lip, the incessant quivering of this mouth, the Gorgon circlet of tentacles, the tumultuous breathing of the lungs in a strange atmosphere, the evident heaviness and painfulness of movement, due to the greater gravitational energy of the earth—above all, the extraordinary intensity of the immense eyes, culminated in an effect akin to nausea. There was something fungoid in the oily brown skin, something in the clumsy deliberation of their tedious movements unspeakably terrible. Even at this first encounter, this first glimpse, I was overcome with disgust and dread.

Suddenly the monster vanished. It had toppled over the brim of the cylinder, and fallen into the pit, with a thud like the fall of a great mass of leather. I heard it give a peculiar, thick cry, and forthwith another of these creatures appeared darkly in the deep shadow of the aperture.

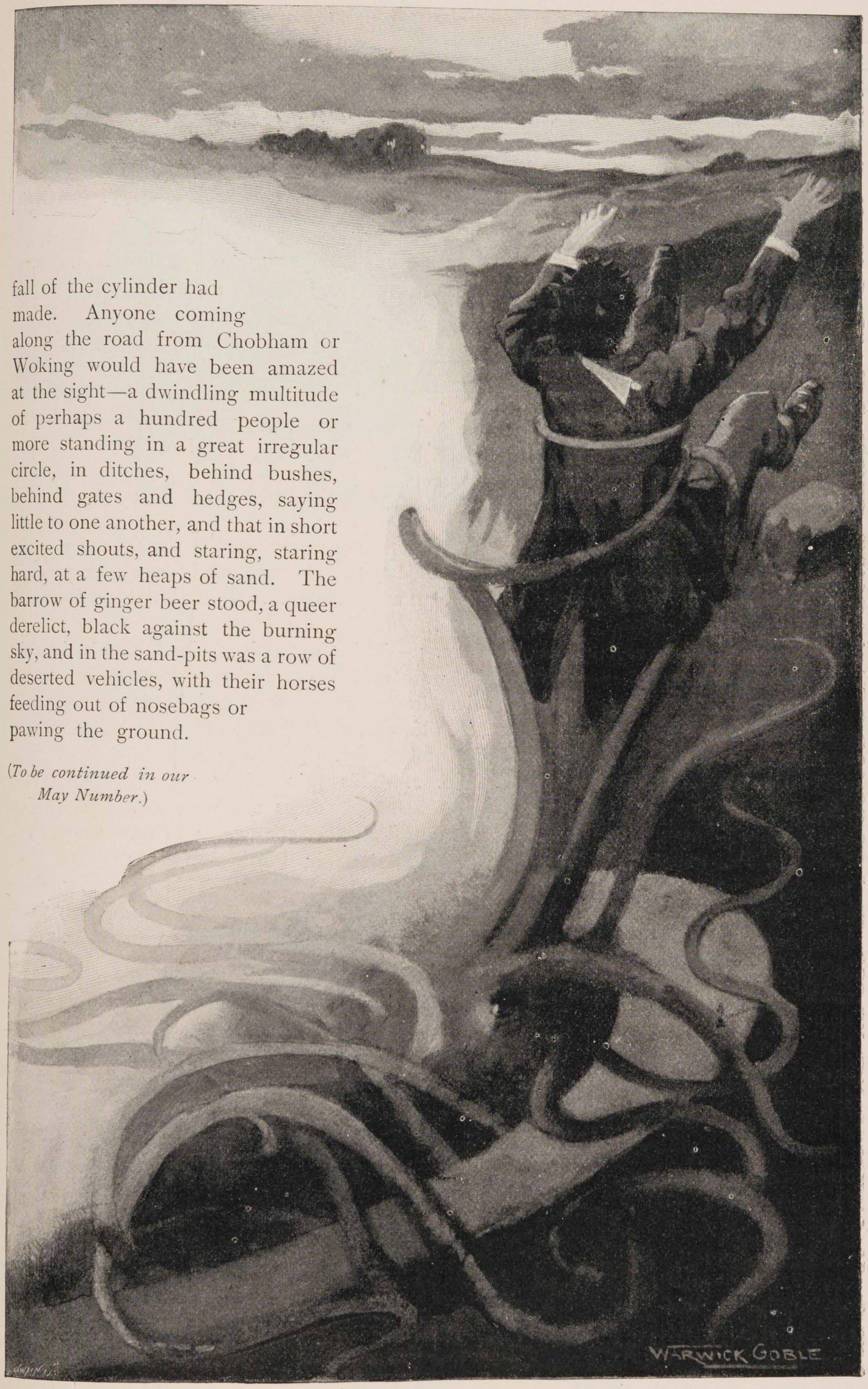
At that my rigour of terror passed away. I turned, and, running madly, made for the first group of trees perhaps a hundred yards away. But I ran slantingly and stumbling, for I could not avert my face from these things.

There, among some young pine trees and furze bushes, I stopped, panting, and waited for further developments. The common round the sand-pits was dotted with people, standing like myself in a half fascinated terror, staring at these creatures, or rather at the heaped gravel at the edge of the pit in which they lay. And then, with a renewed horror, I saw a round black object bobbing up and down on the edge of the pit. It was the head of the shopman who had fallen in, but showing as a little black object against the hot western sky. Now he got his shoulder and knee up, and again he seemed to slip back until only his head was visible. Suddenly he vanished, and I could have fancied a faint shriek had reached me. I had a momentary impulse to go back and help him, that my fears overruled.

Everything was then quite invisible, hidden by the deep pit and the heap of sand that the

fall of the cylinder had made. Anyone coming along the road from Chobham or Woking would have been amazed at the sight—a dwindling multitude of perhaps a hundred people or more standing in a great irregular circle, in ditches, behind bushes, behind gates and hedges, saying little to one another, and that in short excited shouts, and staring, staring hard, at a few heaps of sand. The barrow of ginger beer stood, a queer derelict, black against the burning sky, and in the sand-pits was a row of deserted vehicles, with their horses feeding out of nosebags or pawing the ground.

(*To be continued in our May Number.*)



Suddenly he vanished.